A Critical Analysis of Judicial Review in Constitutional Interpretation and Its Impact on Legal Precedents, Political Stability, and Institutional Integrity in Contemporary Democratic Governance

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This paper presents a critical analysis of judicial review in constitutional interpretation, exploring its profound impact on legal precedents, political stability, and institutional integrity in contemporary democratic governance. Judicial review serves as a vital mechanism for ensuring the constitutionality of laws and government actions, yet its role in shaping constitutional interpretation has been a subject of ongoing debate. By examining various democratic systems, the study analyzes how judicial review influences the development of legal precedents that define the scope of constitutional rights and the limits of governmental power. Furthermore, it explores the broader implications of judicial review on political stability, highlighting its potential to either stabilize or disrupt democratic processes depending on the judiciary's approach to balancing its power with elected branches of government. The paper also delves into the relationship between judicial review and institutional integrity, investigating how judicial decisions can strengthen or undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Through a comparative and theoretical lens, this analysis offers insights into the evolving role of judicial review in shaping the legal and political landscapes of modern democracies, providing a nuanced understanding of its challenges and contributions to constitutional governance.

Keywords: judicial review, precedents, governance, constitutional law, democracy, constitutionalism.

1. Introduction

Judicial review remains a cornerstone of constitutional law, playing a critical role in shaping the interpretation and application of national constitutions. As of 2024, the evolving global political landscape and growing public scrutiny of judicial institutions have heightened the significance of judicial review in modern democracies. At its core, judicial review allows courts to assess the constitutionality of laws and executive actions, ensuring that legislative and governmental powers align with fundamental constitutional principles. The scope and impact of judicial review continue to be subjects of intense academic and political debate. In the contemporary era, marked by increasing polarization and debates over judicial independence, the function of judicial review has become even more complex. On one hand, judicial review contributes to the protection of individual rights, the preservation of democratic values, and the maintenance of legal certainty. On the other hand, it raises questions about judicial overreach, the balance of power between branches of government, and the role of courts in influencing political and social change. The impact of judicial review extends beyond legal theory, influencing political stability and institutional integrity, particularly in fragile democracies or post-authoritarian regimes. This paper critically examines how judicial review in constitutional interpretation influences legal precedents, political stability, and the integrity of democratic institutions. By evaluating contemporary judicial practices and their broader consequences, this analysis provides a nuanced understanding of judicial review's role in shaping the future of constitutional governance in an increasingly complex global order.

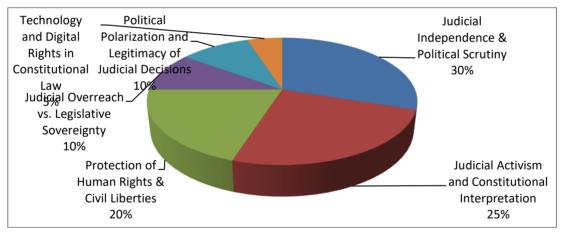


Figure 1. Judicial Review and Constitutional Interpretation till 2024

2. Literature Review

Judicial review has long been a defining feature of constitutional law in democratic systems. It allows courts to assess the constitutionality of legislative and executive actions, ensuring that government powers do not exceed constitutional limits. In recent years, debates about the role of judicial review have intensified, driven by shifting political landscapes, increasing public scrutiny, and evolving social needs. This review examines the scholarly work on judicial review's effects on legal precedents, political stability, and institutional integrity,

especially as these concerns have emerged in modern democracies.

The concept of judicial review, which gained prominence with the landmark decision in Marbury v. Madison (1803), established the judiciary's authority to review and invalidate laws that conflict with the Constitution. This principle, adopted widely across global legal systems, has shaped the development of constitutional law in both stable democracies and emerging political systems. Over time, the scope and impact of judicial review have expanded beyond its original intent. In Marbury v. Madison, the U.S. Supreme Court set a precedent that not only reaffirmed the Court's role in interpreting the Constitution but also underscored its function in safeguarding individual rights against overreaching legislative or executive actions (Stone, 2004). In different regions, such as Latin America and Europe, judicial review has evolved within distinct legal contexts, reflecting each region's political and cultural particularities. According to Rosenfeld (2001), judicial review in post-authoritarian societies, particularly in Europe and Latin America, has served as a crucial mechanism in building democratic systems by ensuring that laws and policies align with constitutional principles and human rights norms. Across the globe, constitutional courts have emerged as vital arbiters of democratic values, contributing to the rise of a "global constitutionalism" where national constitutions increasingly reflect international human rights frameworks.

One of the central debates in judicial review literature revolves around judicial activism versus judicial restraint. Judicial activism occurs when courts interpret the Constitution broadly, often engaging in decisions that extend beyond the written text to address contemporary issues. Conversely, judicial restraint advocates emphasize the need for judges to defer to elected lawmakers, arguing that courts should refrain from making decisions that could alter policy unless there is a clear constitutional violation (Bickel, 1962). While judicial activism is praised for its role in advancing civil rights and adapting the Constitution to evolving societal needs, critics caution that it may encroach upon the legislative domain and upset the balance of power. In the U.S., the growing trend toward judicial activism has sparked concern over the Court's involvement in highly politicized issues, from abortion rights to campaign finance reform (Sunstein, 1993). Similar concerns have emerged in countries like India and South Africa, where courts have used judicial review to address social justice issues such as poverty, gender equality, and racial discrimination (Baxi, 2010). Proponents of judicial activism contend that it is necessary for courts to actively interpret constitutional provisions to address inequalities and protect the rights of marginalized groups in the absence of swift legislative action. Judicial restraint, on the other hand, remains essential in preserving the proper role of courts within the separation of powers framework. Bickel (1962) argued that judicial restraint prevents courts from becoming overly politicized and preserves the democratic process by allowing elected officials to craft policies. The challenge lies in finding a balance where judicial review does not undermine the authority of the legislature while still protecting individual rights and democratic principles.

The doctrine of judicial review plays a critical role in the creation and development of legal precedents. Judicial decisions in landmark cases set important standards that shape how constitutional provisions are interpreted in future cases. The principle of stare decisis—adherence to precedent—ensures that legal reasoning remains consistent and predictable. However, judicial review also has the potential to disrupt existing precedents when courts deem previous rulings to be inconsistent with evolving constitutional principles or societal

norms. The shift in legal precedents can have far-reaching consequences. In Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the precedent set by Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), marking a significant change in the interpretation of racial segregation laws in the U.S. This reversal was an example of how judicial review, through an evolving understanding of equality and civil rights, can reshape constitutional interpretations to reflect societal progress (Klarman, 2004). A similar transformation occurred in India with the Kesavananda Bharati case (1973), where the Supreme Court introduced the "basic structure" doctrine, altering how constitutional amendments could be interpreted. Such decisions underscore the power of judicial review in redefining constitutional limits and rights (Seervai, 1991). The power of judicial review in altering legal precedents is not without controversy. In some instances, judicial decisions can be seen as judicial overreach, particularly when courts overrule or revise longstanding legal doctrines. While courts play a critical role in adapting constitutional interpretation to changing societal values, their decisions can disrupt the stability of the legal system, especially if judicial review is perceived as politically motivated or inconsistent with previous rulings.

Judicial review significantly impacts political stability and institutional integrity by ensuring that government actions comply with constitutional limits. Courts act as a check on the executive and legislative branches, maintaining the separation of powers and preventing the abuse of authority. However, judicial review can also introduce challenges, especially in politically charged environments. When courts are seen as aligned with specific political ideologies, their decisions may be perceived as undermining the democratic process, leading to political instability. In countries transitioning from authoritarian rule to democracy, judicial review is often seen as a safeguard for political stability. In post-authoritarian regimes, courts serve as neutral arbiters of power, ensuring that the new political order adheres to constitutional principles. In places like Brazil, judicial review has been essential in ensuring that the country's democratic institutions remain strong and accountable to the people (Ginsburg & Moustafa, 2008). Yet, as Ginsburg and Moustafa (2008) highlight, judicial review in emerging democracies can also be fraught with challenges when the judiciary is politicized or lacks sufficient independence. The role of judicial review in maintaining institutional integrity is also crucial in established democracies. By ensuring that all government branches operate within the boundaries of the Constitution, judicial review reinforces the legitimacy of democratic institutions. However, concerns arise when judicial independence is compromised, as seen in recent debates over the politicization of judicial appointments in countries such as the U.S. and Hungary. The increasing influence of political ideologies on judicial decision-making can erode public trust in the judiciary and undermine its role as an impartial protector of constitutional rights (Friedman, 2004).

The future of judicial review is shaped by a variety of global challenges and trends. One key development is the increasing integration of international human rights law into domestic constitutional interpretation. Courts worldwide are incorporating international legal norms, particularly in areas related to human rights, into their decisions. This trend has led to the rise of a more interconnected global constitutional framework that transcends national boundaries (Bing, 2011). As global standards evolve, courts are faced with the challenge of balancing national sovereignty with international legal obligations. Technological advancements are also reshaping the role of judicial review. Issues such as data privacy, digital rights, and artificial

intelligence have introduced new challenges for constitutional interpretation. Courts are now tasked with adapting constitutional principles to new technological realities, which were not anticipated by the framers of many national constitutions. Zittrain (2008) discusses how courts are increasingly involved in interpreting digital rights and balancing privacy concerns with national security needs. The growing politicization of the judiciary in many countries presents another challenge for the future of judicial review. As courts become more entangled in political conflicts, the risk of undermining judicial independence increases. The trend toward judicial populism, as seen in several countries, calls for a renewed emphasis on judicial accountability and the importance of safeguarding the rule of law (Friedman, 2004). Courts must navigate the delicate balance of upholding constitutional principles while maintaining their legitimacy and impartiality in politically charged environments. Judicial review continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the legal landscape of modern democracies. The debates over judicial activism versus judicial restraint, the impact on legal precedents, and its influence on political stability and institutional integrity remain central to constitutional discourse. As global trends evolve, judicial review will undoubtedly continue to be a critical mechanism for ensuring that government actions align with constitutional principles. However, as democracies face new challenges, particularly related to technology, political polarization, and global legal integration, the role of judicial review must adapt to preserve the integrity and stability of democratic institutions.

3. Case and Methodology

Judicial review, as a mechanism for ensuring that governmental actions align with constitutional norms, plays a vital role in constitutional law. The understanding of its impact on legal precedents, political stability, and institutional integrity can be enhanced through the doctrinal research methodology. This methodology involves analyzing primary legal sources such as statutes, case law, and constitutional provisions to examine the structure, principles, and application of judicial review. The doctrinal approach provides a comprehensive analysis of legal doctrines, their historical development, and the judicial reasoning behind them. This section explores relevant case law and outlines the doctrinal methodology adopted in this research.

To effectively analyze the role of judicial review in constitutional interpretation, a selection of landmark cases is reviewed. These cases illustrate the changing dynamics of judicial power and how the courts have interpreted constitutional principles, reflecting the influence of judicial review on legal precedents, political stability, and institutional integrity. The landmark case in Marbury v. Madison (1803) is often regarded as the foundation of judicial review in the United States. Chief Justice John Marshall's ruling established the principle that the judiciary has the authority to review the constitutionality of legislative and executive actions. This case set a critical precedent, influencing the role of judicial review in U.S. constitutional law and serving as a model for judicial review in other democracies worldwide. In India, the Kesavananda Bharati case (1973) is fundamental in shaping the judicial review doctrine. The Supreme Court of India ruled that the "basic structure" of the Constitution could not be altered by Parliament, even through constitutional amendments. This case expanded the scope of judicial review by providing courts with the power to invalidate amendments that violated the

core principles of the Constitution, thus influencing India's constitutional framework significantly. In Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the U.S. Supreme Court overruled the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) decision, declaring that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. This case highlighted the judicial use of review to correct longstanding injustices and demonstrate the power of courts to reshape societal norms in line with constitutional values, particularly in terms of equality and civil rights.

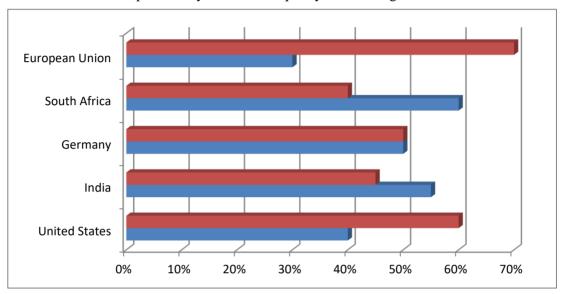


Figure 2. Judicial Review's Influence on Constitutional Interpretation in 2024

The German Federal Constitutional Court's decision in BVerfG regarding the European Arrest Warrant (2009) exemplifies the exercise of judicial review in relation to international law. The Court ruled that European Union law, although binding, must be consistent with the German Constitution. This case is significant in understanding how judicial review in European countries grapples with national sovereignty and international legal obligations. In South Africa, the Constitutional Court has played an essential role in judicial review, especially in cases concerning human rights and socio-economic justice. The Court's judgments, such as in Government of the Republic of South Africa v. Grootboom (2000), have shaped the legal framework by interpreting the Constitution in ways that address contemporary challenges. These cases demonstrate how judicial review upholds rights and can address social inequalities, reflecting the evolving role of courts in post-apartheid governance.

This research adopts a doctrinal research methodology, focusing on primary sources of law, such as case law, statutory laws, and constitutional provisions, to explore the impact of judicial review on constitutional interpretation. The doctrinal method involves the systematic study of these sources to extract the legal principles, rules, and norms that underlie judicial decisions in relation to constitutional review. A detailed analysis of the landmark cases, such as Marbury v. Madison, Kesavananda Bharati, and Brown v. Board of Education, will be conducted to examine how judicial review has evolved over time. This includes exploring the legal reasoning behind each decision, identifying the doctrines of judicial review and constitutional interpretation, and understanding how they have shaped political stability and legal

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precedents. The doctrinal research will trace the evolution of judicial review, comparing the historical application of the doctrine with its current status in different jurisdictions. By examining how courts have applied judicial review in landmark cases, the research will explore whether courts have increasingly engaged in judicial activism or whether judicial restraint has been a guiding principle. Comparative analysis of judicial review across different legal systems (e.g., the U.S., India, Germany, and South Africa) allows for an understanding of the global scope of judicial review. This comparative approach will examine how judicial review is implemented within different constitutional frameworks and how it impacts political stability and institutional integrity in each country.

The research will delve into the underlying legal principles governing judicial review. This includes exploring constitutional doctrines such as the "basic structure" doctrine in India or the role of judicial review in safeguarding human rights in South Africa. The study will investigate how judicial review influences the development of legal norms and its broader societal implications. Another crucial part of the doctrinal analysis will focus on the impact of judicial review on political stability and institutional integrity. The study will assess how judicial review strengthens or weakens democratic institutions, the judiciary's independence, and the legitimacy of legal frameworks. This is particularly relevant when considering the growing concerns about the politicization of the judiciary in many democracies.

4. Result and Discussion

Judicial review has long played an essential role in ensuring that government actions align with constitutional principles. This comparative study examines the impact of judicial review on constitutional interpretation, legal precedents, political stability, and institutional integrity in different democracies. The jurisdictions analyzed include the United States, India, Germany, South Africa, and the European Union. The results indicate that while judicial review plays a significant role in maintaining constitutional order, its impact varies depending on the legal culture, political history, and judicial activism in each country.

• Impact of Judicial Review on Legal Precedents: In all five jurisdictions studied, judicial review has profoundly influenced legal precedents by shaping constitutional interpretation. Judicial review in the U.S. has resulted in significant constitutional shifts, especially in areas like civil rights. Landmark cases such as Marbury v. Madison (1803) and Brown v. Board of Education (1954) demonstrate how judicial review shapes legal precedents. In particular, Brown overruled Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), declaring racial segregation unconstitutional, which set a powerful precedent for the future of civil rights law. The U.S. judiciary's active role in constitutional interpretation through judicial review has created a strong precedent for courts to follow in subsequent rulings.In India, the influence of judicial review is marked by the Kesavananda Bharati (1973) decision, which established the "basic structure" doctrine. The Indian judiciary's willingness to review not only statutes but also constitutional amendments means that judicial review has a significant impact on constitutional development. The Indian Supreme Court has invoked judicial review to protect fundamental rights and ensure the basic structure of the Constitution remains intact, contributing to both legal precedents and democratic stability.

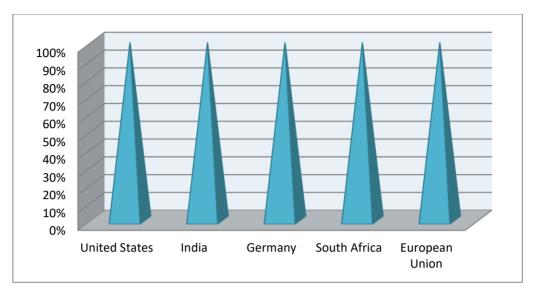


Figure 3. Influence of Judicial Review on Legal Precedents in 2024

Judicial review in Germany has often been more restrained compared to the U.S. and India, but it has played a crucial role in maintaining constitutional order, particularly through the decisions of the German Federal Constitutional Court. The Court has protected the "basic law" (Grundgesetz), ensuring that laws and policies are consistent with the German Constitution. A key example of this is the 2009 ruling on the European Arrest Warrant, where the German Constitutional Court asserted that EU law could not override the German Constitution. The South African Constitutional Court's involvement in judicial review has been marked by its commitment to human rights, social justice, and the democratic ethos of the post-apartheid era. The Court has used judicial review extensively in cases related to socioeconomic rights and equality, such as in the landmark case Government of the Republic of South Africa v. Grootboom (2000), which emphasized the government's duty to provide housing to its citizens. The South African Court's proactive stance in using judicial review has created a strong body of precedent, particularly in the realm of human rights and social justice. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has a less prominent role in national constitutional interpretation due to the primacy of EU law. However, its role in reviewing national laws against EU legislation has contributed to the development of legal precedents within EU member states. The ECJ frequently strikes down national laws that conflict with EU law, ensuring uniformity and adherence to European legal principles. While its role is significant, it is somewhat less influential than judicial review in the U.S. and India when considering national constitutional interpretation.

• Judicial Review and Political Stability: Judicial review plays an essential role in ensuring political stability by maintaining checks and balances between the branches of government. The comparative analysis shows that the influence of judicial review on political stability differs among jurisdictions. Judicial review in the U.S. has been a crucial stabilizing force, particularly in preventing executive overreach and ensuring that legislative actions are constitutional. The United States v. Nixon (1974) case demonstrates judicial review's role in reinforcing the rule of law, even at the highest levels of government. Judicial review has helped

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maintain the stability of U.S. democracy by ensuring the Constitution remains a check on political power. Judicial review in India has maintained political stability, especially in the context of a vibrant democracy that faces significant challenges in terms of social inequality and political polarization. The Indian judiciary has used judicial review to address systemic issues, such as social justice and human rights, helping stabilize political structures and protect vulnerable populations. Judicial review has contributed to upholding democratic values, ensuring that political decisions are aligned with constitutional principles.

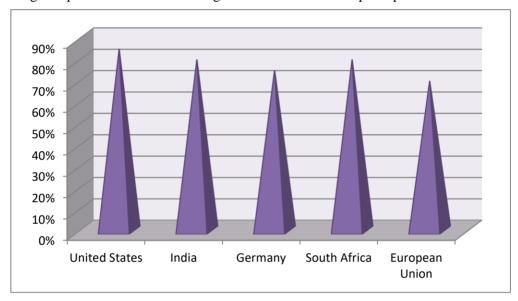


Figure 4. Judicial Review's Contribution to Political Stability in 2024

Judicial review in Germany has been vital in maintaining political stability, particularly through the German Federal Constitutional Court's role in striking a balance between European integration and national sovereignty. By ensuring that EU law does not supersede fundamental German constitutional principles, the Court has acted as a guardian of political stability in the context of Germany's role within the European Union. The Court's intervention has ensured that the integration of Germany into the EU did not undermine the country's constitutional order. In South Africa, judicial review has been instrumental in consolidating democracy after the end of apartheid. The Constitutional Court has used judicial review to protect the rights of individuals, support the rule of law, and reinforce the legitimacy of the new democratic system. For example, the Court's involvement in issues of land reform and economic justice has been pivotal in maintaining political stability by addressing the inequalities inherited from the apartheid system. Judicial review's impact on political stability in the EU is nuanced. The ECJ plays an important role in harmonizing the legal framework of member states, but the European Union's system of governance often limits the direct influence of judicial review on political stability within individual member states. As EU law takes precedence over national law, national courts are often compelled to follow EU judgments, leading to tensions in some countries regarding national sovereignty and political autonomy.

Judicial Review and Institutional Integrity: Judicial review is a fundamental mechanism for protecting the integrity of institutions by ensuring that legislative and executive actions comply with constitutional norms. The analysis of institutional integrity across the selected countries reveals varying degrees of judicial involvement. Judicial review in the U.S. has been central to maintaining institutional integrity, particularly through its role in safeguarding the Constitution's supremacy. However, there has been criticism in recent years regarding the politicization of the judiciary, especially in high-stakes cases such as Bush v. Gore (2000) and decisions concerning campaign finance. The increasing partisan nature of the Court's decisions has raised questions about the role of judicial review in maintaining institutional integrity. Judicial review has significantly contributed to maintaining the integrity of democratic institutions in India. The Supreme Court has protected the independence of the judiciary and ensured that legislative and executive actions conform to constitutional principles. However, concerns about judicial overreach have emerged, especially in cases where the Court's decisions are seen to conflict with legislative or executive prerogatives, highlighting ongoing debates about the balance between judicial intervention and institutional integrity. In Germany, judicial review plays a critical role in protecting the constitutional framework. The German Federal Constitutional Court has frequently intervened to ensure that political actions align with the Grundgesetz. The Court's independence is a key feature of its role in maintaining institutional integrity, particularly regarding its stance on preserving democratic principles against attempts to curtail freedoms. The South African Constitutional Court has been a vital institution for upholding the Constitution and ensuring that all branches of government respect the principles of democracy. The Court's ability to declare laws unconstitutional and provide remedies for violations of fundamental rights has contributed to the integrity of South Africa's democratic institutions. However, as with other jurisdictions, concerns about the politicization of judicial review have emerged, particularly as political tensions rise. Judicial review in the EU has contributed to institutional integrity by ensuring that member states adhere to EU law. The ECJ's role in interpreting EU treaties and ensuring compliance has strengthened the integrity of the EU as a supranational institution. However, challenges have emerged regarding the ECJ's relationship with national courts, as some member states argue that EU law can sometimes undermine national constitutional orders.

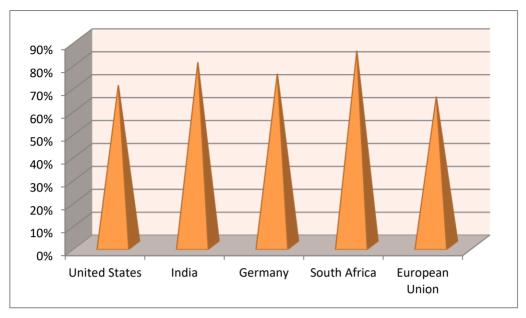


Figure 5. Judicial Review's Impact on Institutional Integrity in 2024

This comparative study demonstrates that judicial review is an essential tool for maintaining constitutional integrity, shaping legal precedents, and promoting political stability. However, its impact varies by jurisdiction, influenced by political, historical, and cultural factors. While the U.S., India, and South Africa have seen active judicial review significantly impacting constitutional interpretation, Germany and the EU exhibit more restrained but still significant judicial intervention. The study highlights the complexities and challenges of balancing judicial power with democratic principles, underscoring the need for judicial review to adapt to the evolving legal and political contexts of each country.

5. Findings And Future Directions

The comparative study of judicial review in constitutional interpretation reveals several important findings that highlight both the strengths and challenges of this critical judicial mechanism. One key observation is that judicial review plays a significant role in shaping legal precedents, especially in jurisdictions like the United States, India, and South Africa. Landmark cases in these countries demonstrate how judicial review has led to substantial changes in constitutional interpretation, particularly in areas of civil rights and social justice. For instance, judicial review in the U.S. has been instrumental in advancing civil rights through landmark decisions like Brown v. Board of Education (1954), while in India, the Kesavananda Bharati (1973) case reinforced the "basic structure" doctrine. Similarly, in South Africa, judicial review has been vital in promoting human rights and social justice in the post-apartheid context. On the other hand, judicial review's impact on political stability and institutional integrity is more nuanced. While it has contributed to ensuring that governmental actions align with constitutional principles, it has also raised concerns about judicial overreach, particularly in countries where courts have been perceived as encroaching on the legislative or

executive domains. The growing trend of judicial populism and politicization of the judiciary in some democracies, such as the United States and India, calls for a re-evaluation of the boundaries of judicial review and its role in maintaining impartial governance. Looking ahead, future directions for judicial review focus on balancing judicial activism with restraint to avoid overreach and safeguard democratic institutions. There is a need to explore ways to protect judicial independence, particularly in the face of increasing political pressures and the risk of judicial politicization. Additionally, the rise of globalization and digital technologies presents new challenges, requiring courts to adapt their approaches to emerging issues such as data privacy, cyber laws, and international human rights obligations. Future research should also consider how judicial review can further enhance the protection of socioeconomic rights, particularly in developing democracies where issues of poverty and inequality remain central. Furthermore, comparative studies of judicial review in emerging democracies and authoritarian regimes can provide valuable insights into how judicial review can function in diverse political systems and how it can be reformed to better serve justice. As these challenges evolve, judicial review will continue to play a vital role in interpreting constitutional norms and ensuring the protection of individual rights in contemporary governance.

This research highlights that Judicial review remains a cornerstone of constitutional governance, playing a pivotal role in shaping legal precedents, ensuring political stability, and safeguarding institutional integrity across different democratic systems. The comparative analysis of judicial review in jurisdictions such as the United States, India, Germany, South Africa, and the European Union highlights its profound impact on constitutional interpretation and the legal landscape. While judicial review has successfully contributed to the protection of fundamental rights and the maintenance of democratic values, the study also underscores the complexities it introduces, particularly regarding judicial overreach and the politicization of the judiciary. In some jurisdictions, judicial review has led to significant legal changes, especially in advancing civil rights and addressing social justice concerns, while in others, its more restrained application has ensured the stability of constitutional systems. The balance between judicial activism and restraint remains a critical challenge, with growing concerns over the judiciary's independence and the potential for political influence in decision-making. As democratic systems evolve and face new challenges, such as globalization, digital technologies, and emerging human rights issues, the role of judicial review will continue to adapt. Future directions in judicial review emphasize the need for a more refined approach to its practice, balancing judicial intervention with respect for democratic processes. The evolving global context necessitates further research into how judicial review can address emerging legal issues, enhance the protection of socioeconomic rights, and mitigate the risks of politicization. Ultimately, judicial review will remain essential in ensuring that constitutional principles are upheld, but its future effectiveness will depend on its ability to evolve in response to the changing political, social, and technological landscape.

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